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THE OLDEST STATUE IN THE WORLD.

BY EDGAR JAMES BANKS,
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During the afternoon of the 27th of last January, while standing on the summit of the temple at Bismya watching the progress of the excavations, Abbas, a bright young Arab from Affedj, stuck his head out of the trench in which he was working, and excitedly motioned to me. In a moment I was in the trench. Two and a half meters below the surface, and imbedded in the west corner of the mud-brick platform of the temple, appeared the smooth white shoulder of a large marble statue. As the discovery of such an object creates great excitement among the superstitious men, I quickly covered the white marble with dirt and, with the remark that it was nothing but a stone, transferred the gang to another place. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in wondering if the statue were perfect, or if its head were lacking; if it bore an inscription, and what its age might be. When at sunset the last man had left the excavations, we descended into the trench and with our hands carefully dug away the hard dirt from beneath the statue. The bent elbow appeared; we had found a statue with the arms free from the body. We dug toward the neck, and to our disappointment the marble came to an end; the statue was headless. Then, digging at the other end, we reached the feet; the toes were missing, but we recovered them from among the small fragments of marble which were scattered about in the dirt. It was dark when the statue was released, and standing upright, by the light of a match, we searched it over for an inscription; but beneath the clinging dirt nothing like writing was visible. Wrapping about it an *aba*, we each took turn in carrying it to camp, fully a quarter of a mile away. It was not an easy task, for our ancient king weighed nearly two hundred pounds.

In the tent a bath was quickly prepared, and, as the dirt was washed away, three lines of a beautifully distinct inscription in the most archaic character appeared written across the right upper arm. There were but three short lines, little more than

three words ; but later, when I was able to translate them, they told us all that we most wished to know.

About three weeks later, February 18, a workman, who was employed at the north corner of the temple, thirty meters from

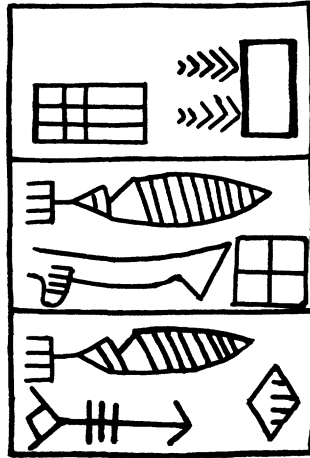


the spot where the statue was found, was clearing away the dirt near a wall, when a large round piece of dirty marble rolled out. We picked it up and cleared away the dirt. Slowly the eyes, the nose, and the ears of the head of a statue appeared. I hurriedly took it to my tent and placed it upon the neck of the headless statue. It fitted ; the statue was complete. From beneath the thick coating of dirt the marble face seemed to light up with a wonderful smile of gratitude, for the long sleep of thousands of years in the grave was at an end, and the long-lost head was restored ; or perhaps the smile was but the reflection of our own feelings.

The statue, including the low pedestal upon which it stands, is 78 centimeters high and 81 around the bottom of the skirt. The upper part of the body is entirely naked ; the lower part is clothed in an embroidered skirt of six folds held up by a band and fastened behind. The back and shoulders are gracefully formed, the arms at the elbows are free from the body, and the hands are clasped before the waist. The well-shaped head is without hair, and the face is beardless ; the eyes and eyebrows are now hollows in which ivory or precious stones were set. This

is by far the most perfect and graceful statue yet found in Babylonia, and, as far as I know, the only one really in the round.

The inscription of three lines on its right upper arm is as follows:



E-šar
Lugal Dad-du¹
Lugal Ud-nun-ki

(Temple) Eshar.
King Daddu.
King of Udnun.

The first tells us the name of the temple of ancient Bismya, a temple quite new to Assyriologists. The second gives the name of the king represented by the statue; it may be pronounced Dad-du or Da-udu (David?), a name hitherto unknown. The third line contains the ancient name of Bismya, Ud-nun which is mentioned, together with other Babylonian cities, in IV R., 38, 5, V R. 23, 27 *sq.* and in the Code of Hammurabi. The two elements of the name are joined together, but its frequent repetition upon tablets, seal cylinders, and vases, makes the reading certain.

When did this unknown king, Daddu—if that be his name—live? And when did his newly discovered city, Ud-nun, flourish? Further excavations at Bismya will answer the question. For the present it must suffice to say that the archaic character of the writing, the depth at which the statue was discovered, far below the ruins of Naram-Sin's time, the entire absence of the name both of the king and of the city in the earliest records from Nippur and Telloh, and a study of other inscriptions found at Bismya, all point to an antiquity exceeding that of any other known king of Babylonia.

BAGDAD, August 1, 1904.

¹ Perhaps it would be better to read as indicated below, Da-udu.—PRICE.